

## Castle Introduces Comprehensive Lobbying and Ethics Reform Legislation, Calls for more Mandatory Ethics Training for Members, Staff and Lobbyists -- March 10, 2006

After 14 months of no action from the House Committee on Standards, Castle says it is time for an "Investigations Commission," independent from Congress

Wilmington, DE -- In the wake of lobbying and ethics scandals surrounding Congress and concerned that the House Committee on Standards hasn't functioned for the past 14 months, Delaware Congressman Mike Castle today introduced comprehensive legislation to create an outside Investigations Commission. The Accountability and Transparency in Ethics Act offers a unique approach in comparison to the current proposals, by also requiring the mandatory licensing and ethics training of lobbyists and formal ethics education for Members of Congress and their staffs.

"If there is a silver lining in the clouds surrounding recent ethics problems in Congress, it is the opportunity to enact real reform. There may not be a simple way to prevent the abuse of power, but I am dedicated to addressing some of the current weaknesses," Castle said.

"For this reason, I am introducing the Accountability and Transparency in Ethics Act which addresses the lack of review and enforcement over lobbyists and creates an outside investigation arm of the Committee on Standards called the Investigations Commission. My legislation would establish mandatory ethics training of Members, staff and lobbyists, holds lobbyists liable for knowingly violating the gift ban, ensures all disclosure files are publicly accessible and extends the period of time that former Members or staff must wait to lobby. It is my hope this legislation, which focuses on transparency, education and accountability, will be included in the larger ethics package the House of Representatives plans to consider in April."

The Accountability and Transparency in Ethics Act addresses three aspects of the current ethical problems in Congress by creating an independent Investigations Commission, strengthening the House Committee on Standards and regulating professional lobbyists. An outline of these three cornerstones of the legislation is copied below:

### Creation of an Investigations Commission:

- Comprised of 7 Commissioners; 3 chosen by the Majority Party and 3 chosen by the Minority Party.
- Only former Members and retired federal judges may serve on this Commission.
- Chair must be agreed upon by House Speaker and Minority Leader.
- No Commissioner may have lobbied for five years previous to term.

### Commission duties include :

- To investigate, with subpoena power, and alleged violation of any law or regulation by a Member, Delegate, officer or

staff of the House of Representatives.

- To report findings and recommend disciplinary action to the House Committee on Standards.
- To report any evidence of violation to the appropriate State or Federal authorities.

Strengthen House Committee on Standards and Conduct:

- Mandatory ethics training for ALL Members and staff to be conducted within 30 days of the swearing-in of a Member or commencement of employment.
- Committee will now serve as clearinghouse of information and will maintain all travel and disclosure reports from lobbyists, Members and staff. Currently, this information is filed by the Clerk of the House and not reviewed, which reflects the lack of oversight in the process. Commissioners will have the ability to review the filings and ask questions where there appear to be discrepancies.
- All information should be maintained in a public and electronic database.

Regulation of Professional Lobbyists:

- Registered lobbyists must take an ethics course administered by the House Committee on Standards. Without this training, the lobbyists cannot obtain a license to practice in the House of Representatives.
- As part of the database to be developed, maintained and reviewed, the House Committee on Standards, will develop an electronic form so lobbyists can file streamlined quarterly reports (as opposed to biannual reports).
- Those lobbyists who break the law by knowingly offering a gift, meal or travel that violates the gift rules will be subject to civil penalty and revocation of license to lobby.
- Revolving door policies for any Members or staff of the House of Representatives shall change to either one-year, or the duration of the Congress, whichever is longer. In addition, all personal or Committee staff will be included in these policies, rather than simply senior staff as it stands now.

Additional Castle Concerns :

Castle also outlined additional concerns regarding ethics and lobbying. Most notably, he plans on addressing the following issues through sponsorship or co-sponsorship of other legislation:

- Limitations on certain private travel, particularly the use of corporate airplanes with limited reimbursement
- Limitations on, or the elimination of 527 groups, in addition to a review of leadership Political Action Committees, particularly the involvement of registered lobbyists in fundraising
- The demand of prudence and transparency in the earmark process.

